

Trouble on Board:

Agitators, Instigators and Malcontents
(oh my!)

Kathy Nevans

National PTA Board Member Director

Today

- ✓ Explore causes and preventative measures
- ✓ Learn to identify and nullify bad behaviors
- ✓ When all else fails, learn how remove the problem individual.

Root Causes

- Pre-existing Condition:
 - previous experience, assumption, perception
- Home Made:
 - Lack of training or orientation
 - No clearly defined job description
 - Unclear or missing expectations
 - Recruited for the wrong reason

From tiny seeds grow big problems...

- ❁ Recruitment must be deliberate and strategic.
- ❁ Bad behavior must be addressed.
- ❁ Board must be held accountable.
- ❁ All Board members must be aware of their legal responsibilities

Prevention: Now is the Time

❧ Don't Rush:

- ❧ Don't fill seats just because....
- ❧ Evaluate the needs of your PTA
- ❧ Assess past behavior of individuals
- ❧ Choose someone to complement board and bring necessary skills
- ❧ TIP: Board “application” and “interview”
- ❧ TIP: Board needs assessment

Prevention: Now is the Time

- 🌲 Educate early and often:
 - 🌲 Orientation
 - 🌲 Job descriptions
 - 🌲 Roles and responsibilities
 - 🌲 Legal responsibilities
 - 🌲 Leadership skills development
 - 🌲 TIP: Board Contract
 - 🌲 TIP: Outgoing person reviews and revises job description

Prevention: Now is the Time

❁ Review and Revise Terms:

- ❁ 1-year provisional term for new board members
- ❁ 2-3 year terms—does this work?
- ❁ Term limits
- ❁ Timing off or maximum years of service

❁ Process for removal

- ❁ Make bylaws work for you and enforce equitably
- ❁ Allow defense, but do not drag out

Prevention: Now is the Time

- ❁ Don't make renewals automatic
 - ❁ Is your board member satisfied?
 - ❁ Is your entire board satisfied with the individual?
- ❁ TIP: Board and Board Member Self-Evaluation
- ❁ TIP: Peer-to-Peer Evaluation

Prevention: Now is the Time

❁ Address the Issues:

- ❁ Don't let things go bad
- ❁ Accountability
- ❁ Enforce rules for all
- ❁ Develop a culture of respect and cooperation

Wait! Wait!

The Questioner

- Asks questions until everyone else moans in frustration.
- Wants to prove she has done her homework (and others have not).
- Questions due to hidden agenda.
- Takes curiosity to new limits.
- Drives change—out of chaos arises a phoenix.

Question Abatement

- Is this a change agent?....a good thing?
- Chair speaks to individual before meeting.
- Was enough background info provided?
- Ask where the questions come from.
- Focus on the really good questions.
- Assign role of “devil’s advocate”

Get Out of My Way: The Bully

- Personal agenda
- Does not develop relationships
- Language inflames and provokes
- Intimidates
- Knows everything; has all the answers
- Appears to have huge ego; poor self-esteem
- Does not expect or deal well with challenge

Bully Balm

- Meeting rules, codes of conduct, boundaries
- Mission becomes focus
- Challenge directly with calm voice
- Break into small work groups
- Index card approach— ideas, not people
- “Are there other perspectives?”
- Find area where she is expert and let her be
- Board chair 1-on-1.

Let's explore every single detail

Micromanager

- High maintenance. Tires everyone out.
- Focuses on process and operation; forgets about results and outcomes.
- Always wants more info.
- Fails to understand board role.
- Sometimes sees self as PTA monitor or guard
- Sometimes lacks trust in PTA or its leaders

Micro to Macro

- Train on board roles and responsibilities; committee vs. board
- Ensure agendas are outcome and strategy focused; don't go there
- Give overviews, stay away from minutiae
- Board chair 1-on-1
- Are checks and balances already in place?
- Watchdog vs. partner relationships on board

Rules are meant to be broken...

Rule Breaker

- Misses board meetings
- Unprepared, wants you to repeat info
- Arrives late, expects to be filled in
- Won't keep to agenda, topic
- Disrespectful of collaborative process
- Doesn't understand role of board member

Enforcing the Law

- Board member/committee job description
- Duty of Care—training
- Board contract
- Code of Conduct
- Do not enable latecomers
- Call missing board members after the meeting
- Ask to step down or remove

We've never done it that way!

Change Resisters

- Highly critical of new ideas
- Negative attitude; nothing new satisfies
- Obstacle to creativity, growth, change
- Drives off new board members
- Been around for years and years

Moving Mountains

- Create and enforce term limits
- Focus on priorities; outcomes
- Reinforce inevitability of change
- Educate—implications of status quo
- Explore pros and cons; assess outcomes
- Discuss relevancy
- Small group brainstorming
- Ask to step down for good of group/individual

Was I supposed to do something?

The No-Show

- Doesn't follow through on assignments
- Doesn't hand in reports
- Doesn't understand role and job
- Unreliable
- Does bare minimum or nothing at all

Making Something out of Nothing

- Ensure expectations are clear
- Job descriptions
- Board discussion on roles/responsibilities
- Are demands manageable? What can go?
- “I’m calling to check why you haven’t.....are you OK?”
- Leave of absence.

The Role of a Leader

- Board leadership is not for sissies or wimps
- Hard choices need to be made
- Bad behavior must be confronted
- Solutions must be found
- Leaders must hold each other accountable
- Leaders have the difficult conversations

Maybe a soft approach....

- “I’m sensing that meetings are not your thing. Would you consider another role in PTA that takes the responsibility of meetings off the table for you?”
- “I sense that you feel PTA demands too much of your time and that our expectations are unrealistic for you. How can we revise the job description to better meet your needs? Do you want a co-chair?”

Maybe someone needs to go

- “I respect your opinion but we must move on. If you can’t support the board’s decision, I think you should consider leaving the board.”
- “It’s hard for me to manage meetings with your (interruptions, negativity). I think it is best if you step off the board now and rejoin it when someone else you prefer is president.”

Leave of Absence

- Board must approve or bylaws/standing rules must allow
- “disability leave” or “starting a new job” leave.
- Specific time limits
- If person remains on board, counts toward quorum
- Suggest this leave to allow someone a gracious exit and allow board to reassign role

Impeachment

- Seek resignation first. Impeachment is a *last* resort.
- Keep dignity intact. This is some child's parent. Limit the negative chatter.
- Discuss the issue, not the person.
- Bylaws should describe process—use fairly
- Robert's Rules contain process, if necessary
- Process in place *before* problem has a name